

# 2009 Aquatic Reserve Technical Advisory Committee Recommendation

## Smith and Minor Islands

The TAC unanimously recommends managing this site as an Environmental and Scientific Aquatic Reserve. The TAC recommends modifying the proposed boundaries to include the publicly managed tidelands adjacent to Fort Ebey State Park to capture important bird usage areas and kelp and eelgrass beds, and extending the westward boundary to follow the 200 foot depth contour on the west side of Smith and Minor Islands, see included map. Approximately 70% of the tidelands at this site are managed by DNR and would be within the Reserve boundaries.

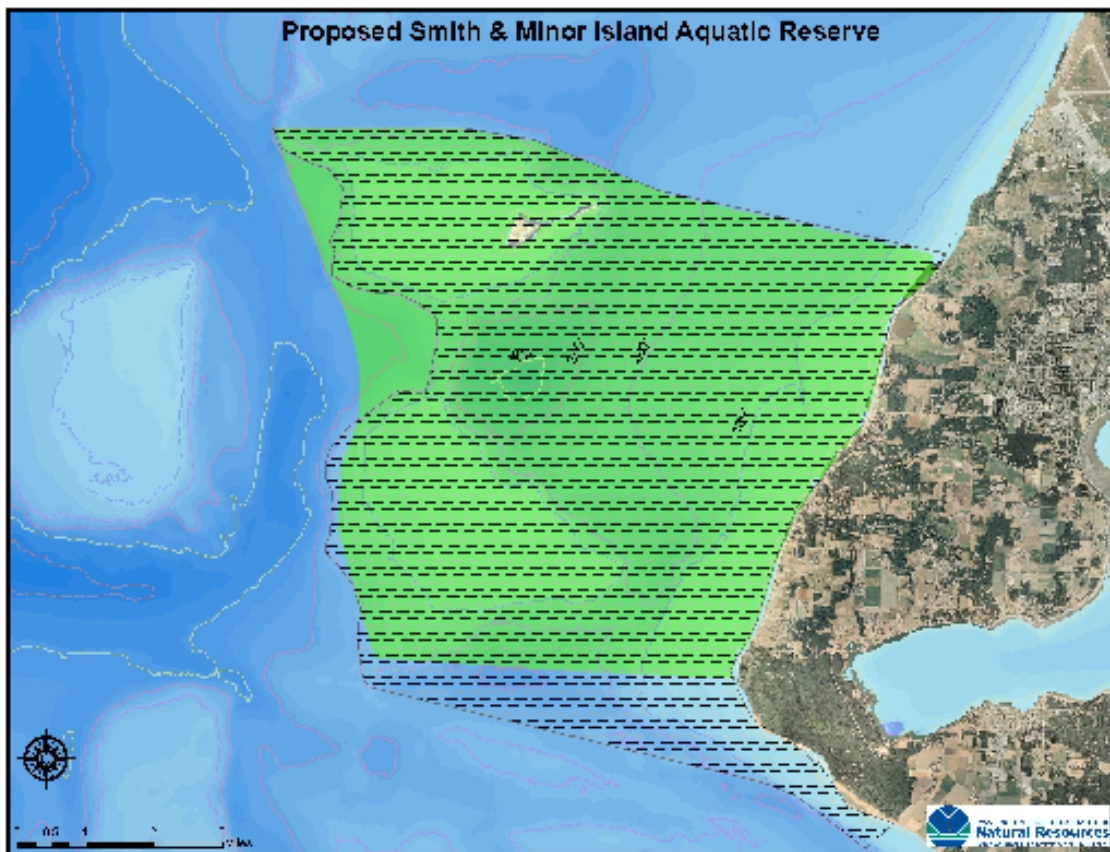
Important environmental attributes noted by the Committee are:

- Location at the confluence of the Puget Sound, Georgia Basin and Strait of Juan de Fuca provides oceanographic conditions that create extremely productive habitats supporting unique and diverse marine communities.
- Largest intact *Nereocystis* kelp bed in Puget Sound (2004).
- Large, species-rich kelp beds and shallow sandy shelf support diverse and extensive forage fish populations, which supports high diversity and abundance of seabirds and marine mammals including federally listed species.
- Relatively pristine benthic habitats support abundant seagrass populations.
- High diversity and abundance of benthic (bottom) fish species as identified by WDFW trawl survey data.
- Intact feeder bluffs and intact nearshore drift cells along west Whidbey Island are important for shoreline sediment patterns that support spawning marine fish and vegetation.
- Smith and Minor Islands are extremely important seal pupping grounds and a haul out site due to the lack of predators and human disturbance on the island.
- Elevated glacial deposit (i.e., Smith and Minor Islands) with unique geomorphic features supports burrowing seabirds, including Rhinoceros Auklets and Tufted Puffins.
- The benthic and pelagic habitats along the west shoreline of Whidbey Island are important foraging areas for birds nesting in Whidbey bluffs (Pigeon Guillemots) and on Smith Island (Tufted Puffins and Rhinoceros Auklets) because of the proximity of abundant fish to nesting colonies. This habitat also supports molting and overwintering Harlequin Ducks, sea ducks, and winter populations of Marbled Murrelets.
- West Whidbey Island is used extensively by juvenile salmonids from numerous spawning rivers from outside the region.

- This site had been repeatedly identified as a priority area for protection by numerous conservation planning efforts.
- Potential for exchange of organisms (source and transfer populations) between Smith and Minor Islands and Whidbey Island.
- Only ground nesting Bald Eagle in the state occurs on Minor Island.

### **Boundary Recommendations**

The following map details the TAC recommended boundary modifications (hatched boundary) to the proposed Smith and Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve.



### **Management Recommendations**

- TAC is supportive of including a 200-yard buffer around Smith and Minor Islands in the Aquatic Reserve management plan to be managed by USFWS. DNR should also coordinate with USFWS to further the implementation of the USFWS Comprehensive Conservation Plan.
- Consider restricting all activities that might disrupt and/or destroy the oceanographic conditions that influence the movement of water, sediment and nutrients, which support an intact ecosystem and a diversity of habitats and species found at the site.

- Consider restricting activities that might disrupt and/or destroy the breeding and foraging habitat for the seabirds and marine mammals that utilize the site.

### **TAC Evaluation Background**

The TAC visited this site twice, once on May 19<sup>th</sup>, and again on June 24<sup>th</sup>. Two site visits were necessary for this site to ensure the TAC had an adequate understanding of the ecosystem and natural resources at the site. The May 19<sup>th</sup> visit focused on the portion of the Whidbey Island shoreline included in the reserve proposal. The June 24<sup>th</sup> site visit included an on-the-water tour of the site, which also included a land-based tour of Smith and Minor Islands National Wildlife Refuge. The following individuals also participated in the site visits and provided additional sites specific information to the TAC:

- Commissioner Angie Homola – Island County Board of County Commissioners
- Leal Dickson – Island County Marine Resources Committee
- Keith Higman – Island County Planning Director
- Phyllis Kind – Island County Audubon Society
- Linda Lyshall – Puget Sound Partnership
- Morgan Schneider – Puget Sound Partnership
- Kurt Beardslee – Wild Fish Conservancy
- Don Lee – WRIA 6 Water Resources Advisory Committee
- Gaylynn Beighton – Island County Beach Watchers
- Mary Beth Crandall – Biologist – City of Oak Harbor
- Abdel Monem, PhD. – Island County Planning Commission
- Jennifer Meyer – Liaison Officer, Community Planner – Naval Air Station Whidbey Island
- Wally Haussman – Environmental Program Manager - Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.
- Steve Jefferies – Marine Mammal Biologist – Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Kevin Ryan – Refuge Complex Manager – Smith & Minor Islands National Wildlife Refuge
- Cyrilla Cook – People for Puget Sound (Representing the site proponent)
- Scott Pearson, Ph.D. – Senior Research Scientist, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Peter Hodum, Ph.D. – Visiting Assistant Professor, University of Puget Sound